

observed a flock, consisting of 15 – 18 males, in which many races were represented, but unfortunately I was unable to collect specimens. Now that we know more concerning the direction of migration of the Yellow Wagtail from ringing recoveries (Mayaud, Moreau, Spencer, Tait, L. Thomson, etc.), their taxonomic problems are going to be revealed in a different light. In Hungary, we have even had two recoveries from Italy. In this respect, I find myself in full agreement with the views of Williamson (1955).

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Two New Races of Birds from the Maldive Archipelago

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During the period December, 1956, to February, 1957, one of us (W.W.A.P.) visited islands in the Maldive archipelago. A small collection of 128 bird skins was made and observations on many species were recorded (Phillips and Sims, in press). The collection was presented to the British Museum (Natural History) and during the course of determination it became evident that the Maldivian populations of the Little Heron, *Butorides striatus*, and the Waterhen, *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, represented new races. Individuals of both these populations are characterised by having considerably more white in their plumage than birds of other populations of the same species. Fortunately several specimens of both were collected and the characters are found to be fairly constant. It is

probable that the increase in white may be correlated with habitat for in the Maldives both species are found on the exposed coral reefs and beaches with their dazzling-white sands. Elsewhere, they are usually to be seen either near mangroves and estuaries or in swamps and along rivers where it is muddy. In both cases birds with prominent white markings would be conspicuous on the mud so on the white coral sands the whiter plumage with its obliterative effect may be of selective value.

I

The Little Heron is of interest because the race *javanicus* Horsfield is remarkably constant in character in Ceylon and over a wide area of Asia yet geographical isolation has resulted in differentiation in the Chagos archipelago (*albolimbatus* Reichenow), in the southern Maldives (*albidulus* Bang) and in the northern Maldives which we now name:

Butorides striatus didii new race

Description: Nearest to *albidulus* Bangs but differs in having the forehead mainly white and the crown heavily streaked with white ; the neck and back are paler being a clearer silvery-grey where *albidulus* is pale buffy. All the wing feathers are edged with white instead of buff. The rectrices are also paler being mainly white with irregular dark patches. The underparts are correspondingly paler being a clearer silvery-grey.

Type: Adult male. Male Island, North Male Atoll, Maldive archipelago. 4th December, 1956. W. W. A. Phillips. Collector's No. 2. B.M.Reg.No. 1957.16.17.

Remarks: There are two adult and three immature males and four adult females in addition to the type. Six of the specimens were collected on the same island as the type, the others being taken on neighbouring islands on the same atoll. In series the amount of white is somewhat variable, one adult female (B.M.Reg.No.1957.16.24) has an almost white crown with only a few black streaks and one adult male (B.M.Reg.No.1957.16.26) has many white secondaries with only slight dark markings ; most have totally white tails. The immature birds are separable from a series of immature birds of *javanicus* from Ceylon by being generally paler and with clearly streaked crowns.

Range: Northern atolls of the Maldive archipelago. (Replaced by *B.s.albidulus* Bangs on the southern atolls).

Breeding: The Little Heron nests during November, December and January in small bushy trees growing near the beaches and swamps. The nest is concealed by foliage being built on a lateral branch about 8 to 12 feet from the ground. It is a simple unlined platform roughly constructed of small sticks and twigs. There are two eggs in the clutch. One clutch was examined ; the eggs were a pale green with a chalky wash and measured 39 x 29 and 40 x 29 mm. respectively.

General: Whatever the time of day the Little Heron is a feature of the beaches that surround Male and other islands. On the ebb tide many are usually seen sitting on knobs of coral and darting from time to time at small fish, eels and crabs nearby. As the tide rises they fly inland to the tops of palm trees or stand on the sea walls and exposed coral outcrops apparently asleep. In the fishery-harbour of Male, however, many resort to the fishing boats lying at anchor. They pass from boat to boat searching

for small fish and unused bait and have become quite tame. When flying between islands they generally fly low over the water with rapid wing-beats. The call is a loud, short 'yelp.' The Maldivian name for the bird is 'Rabonde'.

Acknowledgements: This race has been named after the Hon. Ibrahim Ali Didi, the Prime Minister of the Maldives, whose personal help made the expedition possible. We wish to express our gratitude to Mr. J. C. Greenway, Museum of Comparative Zoology, who generously sent us the unique type of *albidulus* Bangs. Finally, our thanks are due to Dr. D. Amadon, American Museum of Natural History, who kindly checked two of our series with material from the Chagos.

II

The Waterhen appears to be represented by a distinct race in each major island group, thus the separation of the population of the *Insulae maldivae* appears to agree with the general pattern of differentiation due to isolation observed throughout the species. The Maldivian bird we name:

Amaurornis phoenicurus maldivus new race

Description: Nearest to the nominate race but differs in the white of the forehead extending further over the crown and the back being less olivaceous and more slaty in tone ; on the sides of the breast and belly the black areas are reduced in size ; the flanks are paler being less rufous and more cinnamoneus in colour.

Type: Adult male. Hulule Island, North Male Atoll, Maldivian archipelago 22nd December, 1956. W. W. A. Philips. Collector's No. 56. B.M.Reg.No. 1957.16.31.

Remarks: There are three adult and one immature males and two adult and two immature females in addition to the type. Only four specimens were collected on the same island as the type but all were taken on the same atoll. In series the amount of white is variable ; one adult female (B.M. Reg.No.1957.16.34) apart from a trace of black on the nape has a white head and neck while one adult male (B.M.Reg.No.1957.16.30) has white secondaries and secondary wing-coverts. The black area of the sides of the breast and belly varies in width or is absent. The immature birds differ from those of *phoenicurus* Pennant by the more slaty colour of the back and the paler flanks.

Range: Maldivian archipelago. Resident in moderate numbers on most of the larger islands.

Breeding: Gadow and Gardiner (1903. *Faun. Geog. Maldive & Laccadive Arch.*, 1 : 370) recorded taking a young bird from a nest in July ; one three-quarters grown chick was seen by W.W.A.P. in mid-January, 1957. Local inhabitants report breeding from May to September. Nests are built among pandanus scrub and thickets in swampy and overgrown areas.

General: It is an elusive, skulking bird living in the undergrowth around swamps and thickets near the beaches. Usually to be seen feeding on the beaches at low tide. Many appear to have become largely terrestrial and live away from water. A very noisy bird, especially in the early mornings, evenings and preceding rainstorms when its distinctive cry "Crooruwaka, crooruwaka" rings through the undergrowth. The Maldivian name is 'Cumbilli'.